



07-A-38

THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (7): Relations in class

The previous leaflet underlined the importance of the teacher's knowing his pupils well. This would lead, one would believe, to deep interpersonal relations. The reading of the Management of Schools lets one view the matter differently.

It would be advisable to set aside the ideas and practices which we have today regarding class-room relations and also certain current pedagogical methods which are so highly regarded today: dialogue, discussion, work groups, study workshop, pedagogical alertness... none of these can be found in the Management of Schools.

The importance of non-verbal relation

This title only appears to be paradoxical. Let us look back to the concrete conditions under which the first Lasallian schools operated: the classes are very crowded, there are numerous divisions within the class according to order and lessons, in a place not very conducive to teaching. How does one establish and maintain in such classes the order necessary for good work? By rigorous silence, among other things.

It seems that three aspects should be singled out: silence, signs, and vigilance.

The importance of silence

The second part of the Management is entirely dedicated to the "means of establishing and maintaining order in schools". The first chapter recommends to the teacher to be particularly vigilant "that an exact silence is maintained in the school!". The third article of this chapter is entitled "Of the care the teacher should take to see that strict silence prevails in school" and it gives in detail the purpose, the reason and the means.

The purpose:

"Silence is one of the principal means of establishing and maintaining order in the schools; it is for this reason that each teacher should see to it that exact silence be observed in class, and that no one be allowed to speak without permission". (p. 122).

The justification of this is primarily in the spiritual order and not only pedagogical:

"To achieve this, the teacher will convince his children that they should keep silence, not because he is present, but because God sees them, and this is His holy will" (p. 122).

The means: the teacher, as well as the pupils will speak in class only on three occasions:

The pupils:

"The teacher will let the pupils understand that they are permitted to speak in class only at three times, namely, in reciting the lesson, at Catechism, and at prayer times". (p. 123).

Regarding the teacher:

The teacher himself will also observe a similar rule and will not speak except at three times:

- 1- to correct the pupil during the lesson, when necessary, when another pupils cannot do it;
- 2- during catechism time;
- 3- during the reflection and during the examination of conscience.

Outside of these three times, the teacher will not speak unless he deems it necessary and he should make sure that this happens rarely. (p. 123).

The use of signs

Chapter two of this same part deals with "signs which are in use in the Christian Schools". (p. 124).

"It will be of very little use for the teacher to enforce silence if he does not keep it himself; he will teach the practice better by example than by words, and the silence of the teacher himself will, more than anything else bring about very great order in the school, and it will give him the means of watching over himself and his pupils. It is for this reason that the use of signs has been instituted in the Christian Schools". (p. 124).

This is the justification for putting into practice a great number of signs corresponding to diverse school activities, among which are: the prayers, lunch, inattention, school work, catechism and the "corrections" themselves. The paragraphs of the chapter give in detail the nature of the signs for each one of these eventualities.

And to facilitate the execution of these signs, a common instrument for the purpose is chosen, "the signal", which is briefly described in the text and which for a long time has been a part of the tradition of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The vigilance of the teacher

Although put here in the third position in the Management it is the first "of nine principal ways which can contribute to establishing and maintaining order in the schools". (p. 115).

"The vigilance of the teacher in schools consists particularly in three things:

- 1- In repeating correctly every word pronounced wrongly by the reader;*
- 2- In making sure that everyone is following the same lesson;*
- 3- In making sure that strict silence reigns in school.*

Careful attention should always be paid to these three things". (p. 116).

Again it is certain that vigilance is not intended as a disciplinary or coercive end, but rather to facilitate effective work. To facilitate the exercise of vigilance, place the children and station yourself in such a way that everyone is constantly within your view.

This vigilance is exercised not only in the classroom but also in lining up the pupils for going to or returning from church, during the liturgical office, and even in the streets, while leading the children towards their home. When the teacher cannot do this adequately himself, he should pick out certain pupils to assist him. With the good example which the teacher gives on all occasions, vigilance is the aspect to which the Management of Schools most frequently reverts.

Teacher-pupil personal relationships

As underlined in the texts cited below, the "non-verbal" relationships concern the rapport between the teacher and the class as a whole. As concerns the occasional relations with one or another pupil two principal types of rapport can be briefly distinguished:

Concerning authority-dependence relations

These appear for example:

- * in the surveillance constantly exercised over each pupil, at every moment of the day;
- * in case an infraction of the rules is established: the authority of the teacher is seen in meting out penances and corrections. It is sufficient merely to mention this here, without further details, even though it forms a central aspect of the Management of Schools.
- * Contrariwise, the teacher can also reward good scholastic performance or excellent conduct by the distribution of prizes.

In these diverse situations the teacher operates within the authority with which he is invested in order to assure the good conduct of the class. It would be well not to forget that this type of relationship was very much in keeping with the concept of authority in the seventeenth century, "authority by divine right" in a very hierarchical society which was very respectful of established positions and of clearly defined roles or functions.

Concerning personal relationships showing an interest in the child

The respect for this hierarchy impeded neither personal interest nor affection for the pupils. In writings other than the Management of Schools, De La Salle insists on this very much. This interest finds opportunities for implementation on various occasions, for example:

- at the time of accepting new pupils, in trying to gather all allowable information to get well acquainted with them;
- in the keeping of the "Register" in the course of the year, or even the reading of the "Register of Good and Bad Qualities" of the previous year;
- in the continual observation of the deportment and personality of each child;
- and especially on the occasion of absences, in informing themselves of the reasons and in welcoming the child back on his return.

This collection of means permitted the teacher to do a personality sketch of each pupils in the "Register of Good and Bad Qualities" cited above.

To this constant attention it would be necessary add the very precise occasions when the teacher ought to make decisions concerning certain pupils: the choice of "officers"; awarding of prizes; the decision to punish, the monthly changing of the lesson on rank...

On all these occasions, the Management requires of the teacher a personalized attention to the character and to the reaction of each pupil.

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